

HISTORY OF THE INTERMOUNTAIN REGION

UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE

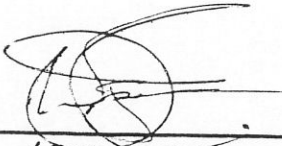
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

The interviewee has given information to be used in connection with the history of the Intermountain Region, United States Forest Service. The purpose of this project is to gather and preserve information for historical and scholarly use.

A tape recording of the interview has been made by the interviewer. An original verbatim typescript of the tape will then be made. The tape of the interview and the original verbatim typescript will then be filed in the historical records of the Intermountain Region, currently at Ogden, Utah. These materials will be made available for purposes of research to qualified scholars and for use in courses, scholarly publications, and other related purposes.

\* \* \* \* \*

I,  JAMES W. CAPRES, have read the above  
(Interviewee, please print name)

and, in view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, I knowingly and voluntarily permit the United States Forest Service and others researching the history of the Forest Service, the full use of this information. I hereby grant and assign all my rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are now known, recognized, or contemplated, to the Intermountain Region, United States Forest Service, Ogden, Utah.

  
Interviewee (signature)

4-5-84  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer (signature)

Caples

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INTERVIEWEE: James W. Caples

POSITION: Former Personnel Officer of the Salmon National Forest

LOCATION: Home in Salmon

INTERVIEWER: Thomas G. Alexander

DATE: April 5, 1984

TA: Jim why don't you tell me how you choose the Forest Service as a career and then about you responsibilities and career on the Salmon Forest.

JC: O.K. One night in Salmon, dirty thirties, everybody out of work or at least looking for work and the only ones who had any money were those who worked for the Forest Service or who taught school. And anybody working with that--working for the Forest Service and married a school teacher was in money clear up to his elbows. (laughter)

TA: That's for the tape a--.

JC: That's for the tape yes. (laughter)

And anyway it looked to a kid in school like it was the only way to make money. This was a very remote and isolated area. There were not many avenues

to see other opportunities or advantages that might be available in the world as a whole because up to that point in time this was the sphere of influence-- as far as I was concerned this was the world!!

Anyway the out of doors always appealed, and I had an opportunity to interview with the supervisor of the forest at that time, John N. Kinney, to determine what was entailed in--a career in the forest service. And whether he felt like it was worthwhile goal to work towards--and he recommended it.

The only means for--someone to gain an education was of course to have work and the only work available was the Forest Service or out on a ranch around here.

And the Forest Service lookout work, trail work and such furnished most of us with an education. I was on a lookout for a couple of years.

And I took forestry at the University of Idaho, graduated in 39 along with everyone else in the United States who thought forestry was the best opportunity they ever saw in their life.

About that time the government was cutting back on the program, there were no opportunities. I came home and went to work in the warehouse here as a pot washer on the fire detail. I wondered then whether I had made the right decision, (laughter) because there were no opportunities at this point.

Anyway in the interim years I worked during the summer months both on the

Salmon Forest and then for the Forest Service in general in Washington, Oregon as a range surveyor on summer projects when they were conducting the range surveys of the West--Also one summer in Colorado--another summer in Eastern Idaho around DuBois, Arco and then on up into this area for the AAA Program because the Forest Service I can't well remember the reason anyway--they didn't have opportunity at that time. Well, anyway through a combination of those, finally got through school.

And then World War II comes along before there is an opportunity to go to work there were not many openings other than just the student work. After four years in the Army came back, still looking for work.

There were no opportunities in the Federal Service although I left applications around like in Colorado and my other previous points of employment in order to try to get back into the system. And they all said fine we would like to have you but there is no money and none in the current fiscal year, we will get in touch don't call us.

I came back here and went to work for a mining company, the Cobalt Operation on the Cobalt District. They were just in their exploration program. And to make a long story short, I was with them for fourteen years; I worked up to purchasing agent and personnel manager.

Any opportunities that came through in the interim years from the Forest Service based on my earlier applications were really so minimal compared to what I was getting at the mine that there was no incentive to leave even

though that was my life long career. The mining company looked like it was going to expand and provide other opportunities. Again a bad mistake because in 59 the mine closed and I again had to seek other employment.

Three years later after working at various other fields, I applied again with the Forest Service because both my wife and I were born here and wished to stay in the area. The Forest Service provided the best opportunity.

I finally got on as a forest technician. The bottom of the ladder in affect and then worked on up to personnel manager over a period of about eighteen years I guess.

TA: Yes.

JC: I did retire.

TA: Well you said you started out as a forest technician here.

JC: Yes, the last go round.

TA: Yes. And then worked up to personnel.

JC: O.K. In the administrative section not necessarily in the forestry side of the profession. And so I worked in resources, financing and personnel. I wound up as personnel officer and that was it as by then I ran out of time. That was about it.

Now, I have got experience in work on trials, telephone lines, lookout, fires (I don't know how many fires I have been on), and planning projects, range surveys, etc.

TA: When were these range surveys that you were doing?

JC: Those were back in the 30's. Let's see now, they started out in 30--as far as I am concerned, 36.

And there was the Kittitas range survey in Washington and then went down and helped windup project in Oregon down around Pendleton--don't remember the name of it right now.

TA: And this was before you graduate though?

JC: That is correct, yes.

TA: So that after your graduation your first employment with the Forest Service wasn't really after you left the mine is that right?

JC: On a permanent basis that is correct, yes. Everything was as a temporary seasonal up until then.

TA: You came in then as a forest technician in 1959 after the mine closed or approximately there.

JC: Well, it was it was 63 really. There was a four year interum where I was in other endeavors. I guess it is all right to admit at this stage in my life that at one time I even sold used cars. (laughter)

TA: Friendly Jim's used cars.

JC: Yes. Honest Jim's I would rather call it. (laughter)

TA: Would you buy a used car from this man?

JC: No way. (laughter) If you can't do that go into personnel. (laughter)

TA: What were your responsibilites as a forest technician when you took that position in 1963?

JC: Oh, I don't remember in detail--just anything they wanted done. (laughter) It was a way in the door until I could get a permanent full time employment based on my Civil Service Application and so on. So I did everything they needed done, you know the low end of the stick. Mainly clerical, even I think to the extent of trying to type. Yes.

TA: Eighty words a minute that sort of thing?

JC: The typewriters were never able to keep up. (laughter) So I don't think eighty was quite it.

TA: O.K., why don't you tell us about your career as personnel officer. What was involved in that?

JC: Well, it was learning fundamentally the Federal Personnel System and then as it applied to the Forest Service. They provided training and on-the-job training and so on. Eventually to the point where I was responsible for personnel and did the hiring and took care of all the records, the health program, the insurance program and the retirement program, etc.

TA: Jim what years were you personnel officer?

JC: Why I would have to go back and look at the record. I don't recall--

TA: Well, what year did you retire?

JC: In 79.

TA: You retired in 79?

JC: And I was personnel officer about four years prior to that to my estimation, so about 75.

TA: O.K. during the period that you were personnel officer the Forest Service moved to a new system of catagorizing people for employment.

JC: This is true, yes.

TA: Did that create any difficulties for you as personnel officer?

JC: Oh, you bet.

TA: Do you want to tell me about it?

JC: All right. Those who were use to doing business on the old way had to be converted into the new merit system and what else was the other key term in there. Well, it all had to be done on a civil service merit basis.

TA: Yes.

JC: And just because you were friends with Joe Doe didn't give you a job type thing. And that was hard for some of the old hands to come by because they had their own favorites or their own acquaintances and were use to doing their own thing out on the district. And when this was taken away from them there was a lot of bent noses over it. So it was a case of instituting this system and getting it to where I felt like we had a pretty good one going here.

But it was not without its trials and tribulations and much smoke at times--desk pounding employees.

TA: O.K. Did you have any particular problems with equal opportunity employment that sort of thing?

JC: No, other than the area in employing minorities.

TA: Yes.

JC: And we were assigned quotas. And just like if--when they told us to go out and hire the minorities, the ethnic, black, indian, chicano, etc., when there are none in this area. That was like telling you to go out and get a buffalo from the local area (where they have become extinct).

And all the efforts, initial efforts to try and get minorities in here were unsuccessful. We would line up a black applicant and then he would not show up. We even went down to the Fort Hall at the indian reservation there and worked closely each Spring trying to get a few volunteers up here--a few employees. I was able to get a few for three Springs in a row in my recollection and they would last anywhere from a day maybe up to a maximum of six weeks. A hell of a lot of effort went into no results.

There was cooperation from the Fort Hall people but the youth just didn't care to go with us. So we gave that up finally. I got a black one time. Got a--let see hired a young black who was from Jamaica--going to one of the universities--just an excellent individual--very very well educated, very well qualified and was on an engineering crew is my recollection at the moment, was a good worker and just a top hand all the way around. But they could not get him to come back because he had other opportunities and so on and never was successful in getting a black here. And to the best of my knowledge never

have had one since.

Well we even signed up with a deal at one time where a representative from Region Four out of Ogden went down to the deep South, Alabama, Georgia and so on and contacted the universities down there and gave opportunities to students who wished to work for the Forest Service and then told them come. He signed up I do not know how many and we had the correspondence back and forth I am sure that what happened is, that they got a map out and took a look at where this Salmon National Forest was located and says, "no way man am I ever going back in there."

TA: So you had a tough time with that.

JC: Well this was the most frustrating because one side you were being continually hounded--you are not meeting your quotas, you are not meeting your quotas. And any efforts we tried in this was futile. A lot of effort and time and money went into to no avail. This was frustrating. It was difficult---you could just accomplish what the goals were.

Of interest may be this, they pointed out to us when we would attend meetings that of all the agencies of the government the Department of Agriculture was the last in its minority employment program. And in the Department of Agriculture the Forest Service was by far the worst. And in the Forest Service Region Four was the worst. And in Region Four the Salmon National Forest was the worst. And so you know it didn't give you a very happy feeling to be head of the personnel department on the Salmon National

Forest. (laughter)

TA: Well I knew that there had been some problems in some of these areas because I interviewed Ted Ransome.

JC: O.K. (laughter) It was undoubtedly just as frustrating to them.

TA: Yes.

JC: Because we weren't meeting our goals either. But that was a tough thing to do. Even now it would be hard to do, I don't know how you could do it. The better way to handle that kind of situation if the need of the country is such is to go back to the old C.C.C. programs which in my evaluation is one of the most successful programs this country ever had--from the stand point of the good for the youth and the good for the country.

TA: Are there any other significant developments during the time that you were personal officer that you can think of that seem important to you?

JC: Off the record. (laughter)

TA: You want them off the record?

JC: Problems off the record would be a bit easier.

TA: Should we turn that off.

JC: Please, because I don't know.

I think one of the most gratifying things and again it was a difficult thing to accomplish was the employment of women because here again it was a man's world. It had always been looked on as a man's world. Most people thought no way could a women ever do any of the stuff that we men did out in the field.

At yet we were one of the first forests to hire as temporary seasonal employees, women in the region. We had them on the survey crews to begin with. And that was quite a eye raiser back in the woods here where you had to go out and camp out. And all the bug-a-boos that everybody anticipated were going to arrive out of that but yet none did. And we were fortunate in the caliber of gals we got they were excellent. They really wanted to work. They were usually from kind of a rural background and--been use to hard physical labor--the majority had a good attitude. So it made for a good relationship.

And eventually on that I think we probably had more success in women temporary seasonal employees and eventually now we got professionals in the course. But that was one barrier I felt we broke here rather successfully.

TA: Yes. Well, that is significant because traditionally the Forest Service as been perceived as a man's organization. And you were able to sort of break that here.

JC: Well it was, yes it was a toughy to begin with because everybody predicted complete failure, chaos and so on.

Unless you have got some more questions I have run dry.

TA: O.K. well do you have any other questions that you want to ask?

OT: Which lookout were you on you said you were on lookout the first two years?

JC: Yes I was on Gant Mountain which lookout no longer exists. It is the one between Clear Creek and and Big Deer.

TA: There is know mountain there anymore?

JC: There is a mountain (laughter)--

Yes and then I was on Sagebrush for a little while.

OT: What year were on the Gant Mountain?

JC: Oh brother, 34--35, 35--36. Yes

OT: And Sagebrush the next two years?

JC: No I just filled on Sagebrush because the lookout--I can't remember

something happened and I had to cover it for him as I remember for several weeks. They then moved in their camp and completed the season.

OT: The Gant Mountain what kind of structure is that?

JC: It was a log base built up about six feet and then on top was a frame building 9'x9'.

OT: Any windows in it?

JC: Yes, windows all the way around and a walk all the way around and shutters on it and it then it had a flag, so called flag log fly shed. This was located on the northside of the peak.

OT: How many manned the lookout before you were there?

JC: Two as I recall. Ernie Waterman who built and manned it. He is still alive and lives here in the valley.

OT: That is all I have.

END OF TAPE